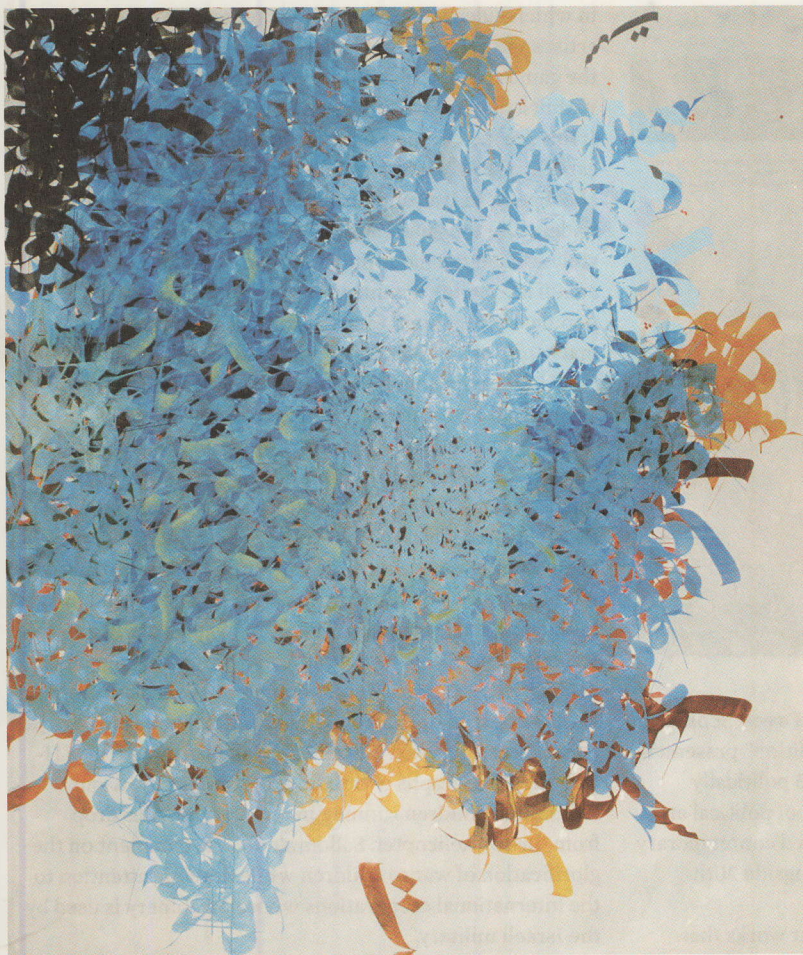


HK \$93
JP ¥1100
KR ₩16500
SG \$18
NZ \$23
US \$12



Pouran Jinchi



POURAN JINCHI,
Untitled (Poetry #99-2),
1999, mixed media on
canvas, 72 x 60 in.

Pouran Jinchi's recent solo exhibition comprised a poetic, decade-long survey of her calligraphic abstraction from 1995–2005. A New York-based painter of Iranian origin, Jinchi, born in 1959, demonstrated a consistently persuasive idiom of meditative reflection, one derived from the tradition of Islamic manuscript painting. Working primarily with the elegant *nasta'liq* script, a Persian adaptation of Arabic originating in the late 14th century, Jinchi renders single letters against ethereal fields of shimmering color, variously inscribed texture and abstract motifs of free-floating invention. She frequently multiplies a letter's structural form in serial or otherwise clustered formation, thereby suggesting a grounding in the lyrical and rhythmic recitation of Persian poetry. The existential maxims of the *Ruba'iyat*, an anthology of poems by the 11th-century Sufi astronomer and mathematician Omar Khayyam, often provide a conceptual springboard for her work.

In this second showing with Art Projects International, which was followed months later by a reprise of the show in reduced format at New York's Vilcek Foundation, the evolution of Jinchi's abstract syntax suggested a symbiosis between the artist's method and her minimalist format. A

recurring principle of formal repetition speaks to her works' time-based genesis, with the result that the perusal of their surfaces seems an act of reconstitution, or recovery of their poetic content from a state of preservation or repose—not unlike how the reading of verses from the Qu'ran recalls their origins in a long tradition of oral recitation. This subtle, yet profoundly performative concept lies behind Jinchi's abstract repetition of letters, originating in Farsi, a Persian derivative and augmentation of the Arabic alphabet, or diacritical markings. For example, in her "Rubaiyat" series (1995-96) the 12th letter of the Arabic alphabet, *sin*, is distributed across a sheet of paper in such systematic fashion that its effect recalls the poured or dripped paint in a canvas by Jackson Pollock. In these works, individual letters seem woven into lace-like patterns from the upper to the lower portions of the support; in others, letters are distributed evenly across the work's surface as though collectively constituting gossamer scrims or two-dimensional tracteries.

In five works from an untitled series (1999-2000), abstract portions of script accumulate like fallen leaves in the lower two corners of the canvas. Here Jinchi's formerly rigorous, conceptual format has given way to a mood far more playful, as letters take on a virtually sculptural dimension. This spirited tendency is furthered in an untitled "Antwork" series (2001), in which ants, whose bodies Jinchi builds with fragments of calligraphy, are marshaled into meandering lines, their migrations of acrylic and ink neatly traversing the otherwise pristine canvas.

It has become common to applaud Jinchi for successfully synthesizing certain Eastern and Western traditions, namely Islamic calligraphy and Abstract Expressionism. But on closer inspection, the justification of Jinchi's achievement by reference to the New York School seems superficial, indeed serving only to state the obvious affinities between any cursive calligraphy and gestural abstraction. In fact, Jinchi's mystical aesthetic is traceable to the abstract tradition of *qit'a*, an Islamic pictorial genre based in the word or verse fragment, and originating in the late 15th century. *Qit'a* was an art intended primarily for visual delectation, the discrete fragments of verse sometimes revealing themselves as gibberish if one attempted to read them. To cite such an august heritage is hardly to diminish Jinchi's original and compelling riff on this intrinsically Middle Eastern mode of abstract eloquence. ●

Gregory Galligan